The Crusades

The crusades were military expeditions launched against the Muslims by the Christians in an attempt to regain the Holy Land. They took place between 1095 A.D. and 1270 A.D. It was one of the most violent periods in the history of mankind.

The starting point of the crusades was on November 18, 1095 A.D. when Pope Urban II opened the Council of Clermont. On November 27, outside the French city of Clermont-Ferrand, the Pope made an important speech . He called upon everyone to help the Christians in the east to restore peace. The crowd's response was very positive. Garments were cut into crosses which were attached to people's shoulders in an imitation of Christ (Matthew 10:38).(1) The original object of the First Crusade was to help Christian churches in the east. The new goal became to free the Holy Land from Muslim control, especially Jerusalem.

Pope Urban II stayed in France until September 1096 to provide leadership and guidance for the members of the First Crusade. He urged churchmen to preach the cross in France. Urban wanted the crusading army to be mostly made up of knights and other military personnel. Since the news of his speech at Clermont spread through the west, people from all social classes and occupations joined the Crusade. As a result of Urban losing control of personnel, violence was launched against the Jews of northern France. This violence was mostly instigated by bands of the urban and rural poor led by men like Peter the Hermit and Walter Sans-Avoir.

These groups lacked supplies and discipline. They attempted to reach Constantinople but most of them never got that far. The leaders in lands which they passed through were frightened and killed

many of the crusading bands. Some did get to Constantinople and traveled across the Bosphorus in August 1096. There they split into two groups. One tried to overtake Nicaea and was unsuccessful. The other was ambushed and slaughtered near Civetot in October. The remaining crusaders retreated to Constantinople and joined the second wave of the Crusade.

The crusaders were eager to start the journey to Jerusalem but they needed to capture the Anatolian Turkish capital of Nicaea first because it blocked the road that would be their main supply route. It was held by Seljuk Turks. In May 1097, the crusaders attacked Nicaea. The Turks realized that they were defeated and agreed to give the city to the Byzantines in exchange for the lives of their men. The Byzantines agreed to this and on June 18, Nicaea was under Byzantine control. The leaders of the crusade disagreed and wanted to slaughter the Turks because they were enemies of Christ.(2) On June 30, 1097, the crusaders were ambushed at the city of Dorylaeum by Seljuk Turks led by Kilij Arslam the Seljuk Sultan. The fight continued until July 1. The crusaders won a big victory and nearly wiped out the Turkish force. This victory opened up the way to Anatolia.

The crusaders attacked Anitoch in northern Syria on October 21, 1097. "This was the main obstacle on the road to Jerusalem."(3) In a long and gruesome battle, the city finally fell on June 2, 1098. The crusaders were quickly attacked by a new Turkish army from Al Mawsil. They arrived too late to revive Anitoch's Turkish defenders and they were forced to retreat on June 28.

The starting date for the march to Jerusalem was set for November 1, 1098 but was delayed by an epidemic as well as fighting to the south of Anitoch. On January 13, 1099 the commander-in-chief,

Count Raymond IV of Toulouse, led the crusaders' march to Jerusalem. They avoided attacks on cities to conserve forces. In May 1099 they reached the northern border of Palestine. On June 7 they camped on the summit of a hill where they could see Jerusalem. Many soldiers had tears of joy on that day. The hill was named Montjoie.

Jerusalem was well fortified and only vulnerable from the north and the southwest. On June 13 they tried to storm Jerusalem but were driven back because of insufficient supplies. Extreme heat and a water shortage lowered morale. A priest called Peter Desiderius told them that if they fasted and held a procession around the walls of Jerusalem with sufficient piety, the city would be theirs within nine days. The crusaders did this and, when they completed building three mini castles, they assaulted Jerusalem on July 13. "There was a frenzy of killing as everyone was hacked down."(4) The governor and his staff were the only Muslims to escape alive. The Jewish library containing 8 Torah rolls and 330 manuscripts survived.

After the First Crusade, four Levant states were established: Jerusalem, Tripoli, Anitoch, and Edessa. The success of this crusade was largely due to the isolation and weakness of the Muslim powers.(5)

The Muslim reunification started in the Middle East under Imad ad-Din Zangi, the ruler of Al Mawsil and Halab. The Muslims got their first great victory versus the crusaders when they captured Edessa in 1144 and destroyed the crusader state in that region. This led to the Second Crusade, which was proclaimed late in 1145. Many people joined the crusade, including the King Louis VII of France and the holy Roman emperor, Conrad III.

Conrad's army left Nuremberg, Germany for Jerusalem in May 1147. A few weeks later the French army set out for Metz. The

Germans tried to cross central Anatolia in October, but the Seljuks defeated them near Dorylaeum. The survivors fled to Nicaea. The other German contingent, led by Otto of Freising, was defeated by Turks at Ladoicea. The remaining crusaders fled to the coast of Pamphylia and were slaughtered in February 1148. Few survivors finished the trip to Syria by ship.

The French army had reached Constantinople on October 4, 1147. The French then journeyed through Byzantine territory in west Asia Minor. The Turks destroyed most of them, but the French king, the German Emperor, and some knights survived and traveled by ship to Outremer from Antalya on the southern coast of Asia Minor. Zengi had died before the crusaders arrived so his sons took control, Saif al-Din in Mosul and Nur al-Din in Aleppo. Joescelin II, the Frankish count of Edessa, took advantage of Zengi's death and tried to regain his capital, but Nur al-Din massacred the Edessan population and retook it.

On June 24, 1148 the High Court of Jerusalem met at Palmarea near Acre. The decision was made to attack Damascus, since Edessa was no longer the war objective. On July 24, they camped along the west side of Damascus. The Palestinian barons convinced the two kings that the orchards on the west were making the siege more difficult, so they moved to the southeast. They couldn't stay very long in the southeast because it was a hot waterless plain. On that same day they withdrew their army. The Second Crusade had failed miserably. There was only one success from the whole crusade: a group of Dutch and English crusaders had captured the cities of Libson and Tortosa.(6) The Muslims had time to regroup after the Second Crusade, and in 1169, Nur al-Din's forces took Egypt. Saladin took control of the Muslims

when Nur al-Din died on May 15, 1174 in Damascus. In 1180 he joined forces with the Anatolian Seljuk sultan, Kilij Arslan II. Saladin stopped the unification of Aleppo and Mosul in 1182, brought Aleppo under his control in 1183, and made a four year truce with the Franks in 1185 after invading Palestine in 1183. Reynald of Châtillon, leader of the Franks, broke the truce when he heard of a rich caravan of unarmed merchants traveling on the east bank of Jordan. In retaliation, Saladin invaded Palestine in 1187. The Franks got their forces together to withstand Saladin at Zippori.

On July 4 Saladin defeated the Latin army at Hattin in Galilee. Jerusalem surrendered on October 2. On October 29, 1187, Pope Gregory VIII, who succeeded Pope Urban II after he died from shock of the defeat at Hattin, declared the Third Crusade. Three major European monarches joined: the holy Roman Emperor, Frederick I; the French King, Philip II; and the English King, Richard I. It was the largest force of crusaders since 1095. Frederick died in Anitoch along with many others as a result of an epidemic. Most of his army returned to Germany. Philip and Richard reached Palestine but couldn't regain Jerusalem. Many cities along the Mediterranean coast were freed from Saladin's control. On July 12, 1191 Acre surrendered to the Christians. Richard left the Holy Land on October 9, 1192. The Latin Kingdom had been restored.

In 1198 Pope Innocent III proclaimed a Fourth Crusade. In April 1202 the crusaders asked the Venetians for transport because they overestimated the number of people who would sail. The Venetians agreed to postpone the payment due to them if the crusaders helped them recapture Zara which had been taken from them by Hungary. The leaders of the crusade had no other choice. Some protested, saying that an attack on a Christian city is a sin. On November 24, Zara was

captured. The entire army was excommunicated but the Pope lifted it when he heard of the situation. On June 24, 1203, the fleet anchored at Chalcedon, and on July 17, Constantinople was attacked from sea and land. Emperor Alexius III fled in fear. Isaac II Angelus and his son Alexius IV became co-emperors. In a revolt in January 1204, both were murdered. Alexius V Ducas Murzuphlus became emperor. On April 12, 1204, they stormed the city and took control of the walls. On April 14 Constantinople was captured. The Crusaders and Venetians murdered and looted for three days. Afterwards the crusaders started their own empire in the Byzantine ruins with a Catholic religion, French speech, and Italian commercial
policies.

The Albigensian Crusade was from 1202-1229. During the 12th Century Albigensians made many converts in western Languedoc. Innocent III preached a crusade against Raymond VI of Toulouse, protector of the Albigensians. The crusade turned into a fight for control of the Pyrenean kingdom of Catalonia and southern France. There was a lot of blood shed. In the Peace of Paris in 1229, the Capetian monarchy began shaping Languedoc into a French kingdom. The church of Rome got a firm hold on southern France. The Christians failed to bring Albigenses under their control.

The Children's Crusade of 1212 began in Rhineland and Lower Lorraine. In the spring large crowds of children gathered there. The leader was a boy named Nicholas from Cologne. The goal of this crusade was to capture the Holy Land. The French King persuaded a large group of French children to return home. The group led by Nicholas reached Genoa on August 25. They expected God to allow them to walk across the sea but that didn't happen. What happened

after that is a mystery. The story most believe says that two Marseilles merchants provided seven ships for the children. Two wrecked off Sardinia and the children on the other five ships were sold into slavery in North Africa and Egypt.

In 1213 Innocent III opened a new crusade. He had no doubt about the Fifth Crusade because the Book of Revelations said that Islam would last less than 666 years. It started in 622 A.D. so they thought it would end by 1288 A.D. Innocent III died on July 16, 1216 and Honorlus III became his successor. "He was dedicated to the crusade but lacked the political strength and energy of Innocent III."(7) In return for the capture of Zara during the Fourth Crusade , the Venetians agreed to transport the Hungarian army. The crusaders arrived at Acre in May 1218. Egypt was now the target. If they could get it, all of southern Palestine could be easily attained. On May 29, 1218, the fleet anchored off shore and the army was placed on the west bank of the Nile. The crusaders overtook a tower protecting Damietta. Instead of attacking Damietta, the crusaders waited for reinforcements. Saladin's nephew, Sultan al-Kamil, attacked the crusader camp but was defeated . In September al-Kamil offered Jerusalem, Palestine, Galilee, and the return of the true cross if the Christians evacuated Egypt. Cardinal Pelagius, leader of the Christian army, rejected the offer. He didn't want to come to terms with the Muslims. On November 5, 1219, Damietta was captured. In August 1221 the Crusaders attacked the Egyptians but were forced to surrender Damitetta.

Emperor Frederick II took up the Sixth Crusade in 1215. Political problems in the west kept him from joining. He wanted to boost his appearance by regaining the Holy Land. Pope Gregory IX excommunicated him in 1227 when his journey was delayed more because

of an illness. He finally left for the Holy Land in June 1228. In February 1229, Sultan al-Kamil surrendered Jerusalem because he was afraid of Frederick's expedition. A ten year truce was agreed upon. No blood was shed during this peaceful, political crusade.

King Louis IX of France organized the Seventh Crusade after the Muslims recaptured Jerusalem in 1244. Louis spent four years planning and at the end of August 1248, Louis and his army sailed to Cyprus. The army spent the winter in Cyprus while waiting for reinforcements. The fleet left at the end of May and stopped off at Damietta on June 5, 1249. On June 6 the citizens of Damietta evacuated in a panic. The crusaders spent the summer in Damietta waiting for reinforcements. On November 20, 1249, the army started to march to Cairo. In the spring of 1250, they attacked Cairo. Louis surrendered to the Egyptians in April 1250. Damietta was given up and a ransom was paid.

The Europeans' calls for more crusades were stupid and didn't accomplish much.(8) Italian cities had better commerce and there was a greater interest in exploring the orient thanks to the crusades. New trade markets were established. The direct general taxation system was developed during the crusades.

As you can see, the crusades were one of the most violent periods of time in the history of mankind.